SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

September 8, 2004
9:30 – 3:30
San Diego, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources, welcomed the Advisory Committee members and led introductions of the members present (see attached list).

Initial Comments

Secretary Chrisman noted that the consultant support contract with CH2MHILL had been finalized the end of June and that CH2MHILL began work on the project in July. CH2MHILL has completed the first deliverable, an initial draft report for existing baseline conditions, and has initiated work on various other tasks.

Senate Bill 1214 was chaptered by the Legislature and is awaiting the Governor's signature. SB1214 will result in several Advisory Committee-related changes: (1) an Agenda Subcommittee will be formed to provide input on the topics of discussion at the Advisory Committee meetings; (2) a Vice Chair will be selected to work with the Secretary to develop meeting agendas and schedule meetings; (3) a geothermal industry representative will be invited to join the Advisory Committee, and (4) the U.S. Geological Survey Salton Sea Science Office will be invited to collaborate on the study. Secretary Chrisman also noted that the California Air Resources Board has been invited to join the Committee.

Public Comments

The following public comments were provided:

- Stuart Hurlbert, California State University, San Diego – The Resources Agency and the Department of Water Resources should consider supporting a Salton Sea science symposium. There is a substantial amount of scientific information that may be of value to the current process but has not been published. A science symposium would facilitate getting this information into the open literature.
- Juanita Salas, Office of Congressman Filner – Juanita wanted to take the opportunity to introduce herself. She will be representing the Imperial Valley area for Congressman Filner.

- Bob Burns, Seismologist and Geophysicist (Retired) – Bob noted that he might have relevant information from his prior work with the Shell Oil Company. He will review his materials and provide information that may be relevant to this process.

Administration of Proposition 50 Funds

John Donnelly of the Wildlife Conservation Board provided an overview of the Proposition 50 funds administration. The current balances (both Proposition 50 and 12 funds) are:

- $20 million was allocated to DWR for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Management Project;
- $686 thousand was allocated to the Department of Fish and Game for Quantification Settlement Agreement and Salton Sea implementation work
- $4.2 million was allocated to bond costs and administration; and
- $11.4 million was used to purchase the Travis Property.

The Wildlife Conservation Board is holding the remaining $19 million.

Ron Enzweiler, the new Executive Director of the Salton Sea Authority, noted that the Authority would like to move forward on variety of projects that would complement the Resources Agency's process. He indicated that the Authority would provide suggestions for allocation of the remaining $19 million.

The recent land acquisition and planning for management of the Travis property were described. Chris Hayes of DFG noted that the property consists of approximately 1,340 acres along the Colorado River north of Blythe. The land is currently in agricultural production and DFG is preparing a management plan for habitat conversion on the property. A draft plan should be available for review in approximately six months.

In response to committee members' questions, it was indicated that the Travis property will be used to meet part of the State's commitment as a participating agency in the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program. However, restoration of the Travis property is not dependent on the LCRMSCP. If the LCRMSCP does not move forward, then the property will be used to meet other DFG habitat goals.

Update on Project Schedule and CEQA Compliance

Gwen Buchholz of CH2MHILL noted that the ecosystem management study and associated reports to be completed under the California Environmental Quality Act are underway. The purpose of a program-level versus project-level CEQA document was discussed. A program-level CEQA document provides an overview or "master plan" perspective, and would provide an analysis of impact and mitigation measures that would then be used in subsequent project-level documents. A project-level CEQA document provides project level analysis of impacts and mitigation measures, and is generally more site-specific than a program-level document. It was noted that a

program-level document can address a phased project and provide the first phase analysis for a project.

The CEQA documentation for the project will also comply with the National Environmental Policy Act because future federal involvement in the project is anticipated due to permitting, funding, or regulatory actions. The CEQA document will incorporate issues addressed during the scoping process. Jeanine Jones of DWR indicated that the scoping summary and comment letters are available on DWR's website.

A preliminary schedule for the legislatively required Programmatic Environmental Impact Report was presented. The preliminary schedule indicated that the public draft would be available in January 2006 and the final EIR would be available in October/November 2006. This schedule would allow the Notice of Determination to be filed by December 31, 2006. It was suggested that the State consider integration with the Salton Sea Authority public outreach program to increase public participation.

Overview of Baseline Conditions

Gwen Buchholz gave a presentation on the initial draft report for existing baseline conditions. This report has been prepared in a format to be later inserted into the Draft PEIR as a portion of an existing conditions chapter. It was noted that this is an initial effort and only based on readily available information. Subsequently, this report will be used as a basis for identifying and obtaining missing information through discussions with local agencies and stakeholders. Member's suggestions for information sources and contacts should be sent to the Committee's e-mail reflector (salton_sea@water.ca.gov).

Discussion on the draft included:

- Study Area – The emphasis of the study area is on the Salton Sea watershed, the area that drains to the Sea. However, less emphasis is being placed on portions of the watershed that are not likely to be impacted by the alternatives (or to impact the Salton Sea), such as the ridgelines and other mountainous areas. Use of the watershed as the primary study area is consistent with concepts included in SB 1214.

  The Lower Colorado River from Parker Dam to the Gulf of Mexico is included in the study area because birds that use the Salton Sea watershed in their lifestages also use this habitat. The Colorado River watershed is also included because hydrology of the Colorado River can affect inflows to the Salton Sea.

- Additional detailed reports will be prepared for resource areas such as selenium, fisheries, avian resources, and air quality. Based on the discussion, other information sources were identified that CH2MHILL will follow up with for more background information.

Selection of a Vice Chairperson for the Advisory Committee

Pursuant to SB 1214, a nominating committee formed by Secretary Chrisman recommended that Rick Hoffman be the Committee's Vice Chair. Committee members voted in favor. The Chair and Vice-Chair will work together to name an agenda subcommittee to help plan agendas for future meetings.

Selenium Overview

Harry Ohlendorf of CH2MHILL provided background on selenium in the environment, fate and transport, and regulatory action levels. Doug Barnum of the Salton Sea Science Office followed with a presentation on specifics of selenium at the Salton Sea and past work done in this area. Doug described the Salton Sea as functioning as a selenium sink. (Studies conducted in 1998 and 1999 showed higher concentrations of selenium in the northern portion of the Salton Sea than in the southern portion. He noted that this might be due to the different currents in the southern and northern portion of the Salton Sea.) There may be selenium concerns associated with past restoration proposals, because of the impact of wet/dry cycles on selenium-laden sediments and selenium uptake and mobilization by plants that provide a pathway for selenium into the food web. Doug noted that selenium concentrations would be a major consideration in every alternative considered for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Management Plan.

It was pointed out that the Basin States are looking at selenium issues as part of the Colorado River Salinity Control Forum, including a watershed approach to selenium issues in the Colorado River Basin. It was mentioned that the Colorado River Regional Water Quality Control Board is not planning to develop a total maximum daily load for selenium at the Salton Sea, because it believes that source control upstream in Colorado/Utah would be more appropriate. Several Committee members noted that source reduction may be the most cost efficient method to address selenium issues, or that fallowing/retirement of lands in the Imperial Valley with high selenium concentrations may be possible. Another member noted that previous work by USBR to identify selenium hotspots in Imperial Valley that might be voluntarily fallowed did not prove fruitful.

CH2MHILL is preparing a detailed report on selenium. This report will include a discussion of selenium treatment technologies and readily available data from other ongoing studies. The report will also consider selenium effects on birds that use all the habitat types at the Salton Sea (i.e., open water, near shore, etc.). It was noted that there are generally more data on shorebirds than on waterfowl due to available access to nests and birds, although there are studies that may be applicable to waterfowl in the Salton Sea.

During discussions among Committee members, it was noted that the effects of TMDL programs in the watershed on selenium mobilization are uncertain. Additionally, Dr.

Barnum noted that it is uncertain if constructing a smaller Salton Sea would change the water body's assimilative capacity for selenium.

Remarks by Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny

Senator Ducheny joined the group briefly to offer remarks on the importance of the study and to express her appreciation of everyone's participation on the Advisory Committee. The Senator remarked that local and tribal participation is important to the process, and that it is important to keep the process moving forward. The Senator noted that the state and federal representatives will need a consensus from the stakeholders on the direction and selection of a preferred project in order to be able to obtain federal funding for the project.

Air Quality Overview

Pamela Vanderbilt of CH2MHILL gave a presentation on existing baseline air quality conditions and air quality considerations in the Salton Sea watershed. The Salton Sea Air Basin is the primary basin for the analysis; however, there is interaction, including transport of pollutants, with adjoining air basins. The South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District are the primary districts with regulatory jurisdiction in the Salton Sea Air Basin. Most of the project area is in non-attainment status for both the National and California Ambient Air Quality Standard for ozone, PM10 and PM2.5.

Construction emissions may be a consideration for alternative implementation. Any project will need to comply with the general conformity provisions of the Clean Air Act if federal funding is used for implementation. This may lengthen the construction schedule to ensure compliance with annual maximum emission limits. The local air districts are currently revising their air quality plans and there may be an opportunity to work with the districts on their planning assumptions relative to future work at the sea.

It was noted that actions in the Mexicali Valley could affect air quality conditions in the Salton Sea Air Basin. Additionally, natural occurrences (including dust storms) also contribute to the air quality conditions in the basin. Air quality standards account for these natural occurrences and the regulatory agencies generally use averaged meteorologic data to account for the contribution of natural occurrences. It was asked how air toxics were going to be handled. It was also noted that emissions specific to individual alternative (e.g. from recreational activities) must be considered.

Overview of the No Action Alternative

Gwen Buchholz gave a presentation on the no action alternative. Development of the no action alternative and the other conceptual alternatives will be the focus of discussion during the next two Advisory Committee meetings.

The no action alternative would include existing projects and future projects/policies that will probably occur with some certainty. Projects and policies that are not firm would be included in the cumulative impact analysis, not the no action alternative. The no action alternative conditions would be implementation of the QSA and its related water transfers. The no action alternative must also consider future land use changes such as conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses and future growth/population projections (sources of information include the Southern California Association of Governments, and county general plans).

Ms. Buchholz also discussed determination of the length of the study period, 45 versus 75 years. The QSA and related agreements environmental documents used a 75-year timeframe. The initial term for the QSA water transfers is 45 years, with an option to review for a total of 75 years. Committee members discussed the choice of 45 or 75 years. Several individuals suggested that because renewal of the contracts at the end of 45 years is discretionary, the 75-year period could be considered speculative. It was also pointed out that it would be difficult to project conditions either 45 years or 75 years into the future. However, because the previous environmental documents had projected conditions for the 75-year period, those conditions could be cited with respect to the previous documents. It may be easier to justify the future assumptions by referring to adopted environmental documentation, especially documentation prepared for the QSA. It was pointed out that regardless of the time period selected, the alternatives needed to be robust enough to be able to be adapted to potentially widely changing conditions.

Following the discussion, Secretary Chrisman committed that members would be provided with a listing of potential projects and policies that were included in the previous environmental documents with a 75-year time frame and conditions that may occur in a 45-year time frame, to see if one time period or the other had obvious merits. This information will be provided to members prior to the next meeting, to allow for discussion at the meeting.

Ms. Buchholz also indicated that the next steps in the project will include identifying a list of concepts considered in prior documents as the first phase in the development of alternatives. Concurrently, screening criteria development will begin. These items will be discussed at the next Advisory Committee meetings.

Future Meetings

The next Advisory Committee meetings will be:

- November 4, 2004 in Sacramento (all day).
- November 30 (afternoon meeting) in Palm Springs (in conjunction with the Association of California Water Agencies conference).

Handouts

Copies of the following Powerpoint presentations:

- Update on CEQA Compliance and Project Schedule
- Initial Draft Report of Existing Baseline Conditions
- Selenium in the Environment
- Selenium in Sediments
- Air Quality – Evaluation of Existing Baseline Conditions and Next Steps
- Development of the No Action Alternative

Initial Draft Report for Existing Baseline Conditions
SB 1214, chaptered version

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternatives Present:

Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Greg Cervantes, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians
Bart Christenson, State Water Resources Control Board
Mike Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Phil Gruenberg, Regional Water Quality Control Board
Elston Grubaugh, Imperial Irrigation District
Rick Gundry, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Dan Parks, Coachella Valley Water District
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Tom Raftican, United Anglers of Southern California
Chris Schoneman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Dennis Underwood, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Barry Wallerstein, South Coast Air Quality Management District
Gary Wyatt, Imperial County